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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

BY

RICHARD GUY BOULET

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

DRAWING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

WINTER 2006



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of  
Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

Submitted by Richard Guy Boulet in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Fine Arts.



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DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS GRANTED: MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,  
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE
"Banner Eight"	2005	Fabric Appliqué & Cross-stitch	88" x 93"
Insurance Value: \$2,500.00			
"Banner Eight Drawing"	2005	Mixed Media	41¼" x 29½"
Insurance Value: \$1,000.00			





# The Atavism of Schizophrenia

**Artist Statement  
MFA Graduation Show  
Richard Boulet**

Atavism: The appearance of characteristics that are presumed to have been present in some remote ancestor.

A professor speculated to me on the reason behind the irregular perspective found in some art of the Middle Ages. I'll put this in my own way. The impact of these divine objects is only experienced when the viewer forgets about his or her body and the soul enters the art image by accepting the conditions dictated by the art image's perspective. Why become a passive member of the audience when the atavistic sum total of the divine can be acquired with a simple act of bodily forgetfulness? We are asked to walk into the painting and investigate mystery first hand.

In the twentieth century, William S. Burroughs wrote "The Soft Machine". The author's deep concern for our errant spiritual forgetfulness required another intense atavistic exercise. Why stop at the lessons of spirit found in the Middle Ages and its cultural codes when we have, all of us, the primitive memory of the era when we emerged from the primordial soup of a preconscious brain and first uttered the words "I have a name! I am divine!"

Schizophrenia is going toe to toe with the violent shedding of all things codified by the nervous system. It is an unhealthy form of atavism. With diagnosis and hopeful recovery, this mental illness can be spiritually liberating and therefore atavistically healthy if one survives the horrific strategy schizophrenia inflicts on the brain. Schizophrenia is a primordial condition that goes too far, too deep, too fast. We people with schizophrenia walk into the irregular perspective of a painting from the Middle Ages but run around in a highly stressed and erratic manner. This is not quite the intent of artist of the Middle Ages. Yes we are inside but we are out of control and terrified. If the brain violence is strong enough we instinctually retreat until all we have left to balance horror is our name and our desire to be divine. The intent of the healthy atavistic awareness that Burroughs prescribed is missed, (not to mention that Burroughs's methodology is somewhat aggressive). This constant state of infinite terror is no way to live.

How does one move from a state of infinite terror to spiritual liberation? By starting with the sword that cut through the Gordian knot, the divinely inspired antipsychotic drug. Stop it! Stop it now! Inside the confines of the psychiatric ward, the person with schizophrenia can hopefully have his or her brain stabilized from an unhealthy form of primordial freefall, and rebooted to the point where simple questions





can be asked. Do you know who you are? Do you know where you are? Do you know why you are here? Do you feel safe?

What happens next? A long and difficult recovery begins with no guarantees of success. Some of us people with schizophrenia, even with medication and a supportive mental health system, cannot leave the grasp of the violent atavistic experience. If the grip is strong enough we never leave the psychiatric ward. Sometimes we get to the point where enough recovery happens that we basically understand our predicament but cannot completely manage the brain's desire to be terrifyingly regressive. We relapse frequently. We may be partially integrated in the community but require constant monitoring. The luckiest of us can recover to the point where we can live on our own and maybe work or maybe...

Those of us that recover to the point where peace of mind is possible can recode our unhealthy atavistic experience into a positive one. Yes, we entered the irregular perspective of the Middle Ages or found our original desire to be a human and yes, it was violent. But over the years we who get to this point of reconciliation can transform our experiences to the degree where the memory of terror subsides. There is a grand perfection to psychotic thinking. The memories of the experience can be divine. Schizophrenia is a long and brutally mangled epiphany but an epiphany none-the-less.

What do we do with epiphany?





# Work

## Artist Statement MFA Graduation Show Richard Boulet

Holding the threaded needle in my hand, I start at the back of the cloth; through, across, down, up, across, down again. I have completed one square of a cross-stitch. I will eventually complete my cross-stitch if I repeat this action many times over. I will then start another. There is an automatic physical precision to this activity. Success is guaranteed with a few carefully calculated design decisions. A mental framework can take form from such a rigid situation. My involvement with the cross-stitch gives me a tangible feeling of being in the moment plus my thoughts are able to delve into the past, my previous psychotic life before being diagnosed with schizophrenia and my mental health recovery. I allow for such rumination as, quite frankly, I need to make sense of this schizophrenia situation and give it peace.

The only other times my art practice had such a precise calculated effort was when I was psychotic. I made a mobile in Winnipeg that I thought connected all human knowledge, many small folded pieces of paper with coded symbols in Vancouver and an Ex Voto in Calgary for mental suffering. This was made from a magazine. None of this work survives. The lesson I take from the memory of these psychotic art works is that even in such a precarious state as psychosis, it is possible to focus sharply and survive. I can cross-stitch, think these thoughts and also stay in the present, my healthy present, feel proud I have made it this far in recovery and keep working.

The machine sewing techniques for the banners are quilt based. I took a few courses in quilting. Then I made a quilt for my bed. This quilt made me feel I could truly care for my self. I could create my own nurtured, feminine gestures for my home. A quilt for the couch and the easy chair soon followed. When my MFA is over I'm going to make a new quilt for my bed, an elaborate appliqué of whimsical birds in a quirky landscape. A new lease on life requires a new quilt, fitting to the potential of the future.

When I use quilting techniques in my work for my Masters, these feelings of a carefully tended home follow me to the studio. The sewn banners with large text assertively proclaim; "This is schizophrenia. This is also sewing. Mix the two and hope through careful nurturing is possible." The cross-stitching says; "Take it easy, one small step at a time. With patience and diligence a delicate, precious completion is possible." With cross-stitch and quilting I feel I am understanding that work learned in a safe home can follow me into the world and add strength to my character to do more than just survive. I can flourish. Is this the traditional quiet message behind all the sewing and stitching created by countless mothers for their families?





My drawing for my MFA has a much different job to accomplish. This is when I mentally let loose. I let my mind slide into the energy of the atavistic schizophrenic experience. I jump into the psychotic with abandon and see what I can pull out by the seat of my pants. The drawing is a testing ground to see if I have finally managed to recover to the point that there is no danger lurking in my mind. What I feel protects me from such a swim is all I have been taught about drawing during my BFA and my MFA and the practicing that occurred in the years between these two degrees. Yes, delving into the psychotic could seem to be a dangerous move but rules do exist, drawing rules that were learnt in university and on my own. Does this drawing of a particular schizophrenic experience need a little more dark yellow here, or a fine line there? It is the sublime training of experience applied to the task at hand that allows the psychosis of the past to be investigated and given light without fear of mental instability.

There is cross-stitch and quilt sewing for creating a home for myself no matter where I wander and drawing for testing my sanity.





# **A Schizophrenia**

**Richard Boulet**

## **Slide List**

1. "Banner One", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 68" x 91", 2004
2. "Banner One", cross-stitch detail
3. "Banner Two", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 66" x 144", 2004
4. "Banner Two", cross-stitch detail
5. "Banner Three", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 74" x 106", 2004
6. "Banner Three", cross-stitch detail
7. "Banner Four", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 21" x 61", 2004
8. "Banner Four", cross-stitch detail
9. "Banner Five", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 29" x 66", 2004
10. "Banner Five", cross-stitch detail
11. "Banner Six", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 29" x 79", 2004
12. "Banner Six", cross-stitch detail
13. "Banner Seven", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 45" x 90", 2005
14. "Banner Seven", cross-stitch detail
15. "Banner Eight", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 88" x 93", 2005
16. "Banner Eight", cross-stitch detail
17. "Banner Nine", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 64" x 100", 2005
18. "Banner Nine", cross-stitch detail
19. "Banner Ten", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 78" x 110", 2005
20. "Banner Ten", cross-stitch detail
21. "Banner Eleven", fabric appliqué and cross-stitch, 64" x 180", 2005
22. "Banner Eleven", cross-stitch detail
23. "Banner One Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
24. "Banner Two Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
25. "Banner Three Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
26. "Banner Four Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
27. "Banner Five Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
28. "Banner Six Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
29. "Banner Seven Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
30. "Banner Eight Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
31. "Banner Nine Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
32. "Banner Ten Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005
33. "Banner Eleven Drawing", mixed media, 41 ¼" x 29 ½", 2005



# A Schizophrenia

Richard Boulet

All letters → FUTURA BOLD (WHITE)

(MULTICOLORED)

EXHIBITION TITLE:  
"A Schizophrenia"

6" letters

10" letters

14" letters

ROXDO?AUCUS!  
TIPBL?FEOMU!  
ZEHWJ?GIVKA!  
NIQUY?  
NIQUY?  
NIQUY?  
YYE!

this is banner #1 it is about neologisms. Many people with schizophrenia speak in altered speech patterns. The banner cross stitch speaks of the difficulty in convincing someone who is delusional to accept treatment

CROSS STITCH

PSYCHOSIS

TRUST

HOPE ON THE WINGS OF A PRAYER

EMPATHY

TREATMENT

6" letters

ESCHER'S STAIRS

MFA Drawing and Intermedia

This is the final visual presentation for the degree

Design: Janine Stowe

TREE











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